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Oral Update of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic

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I. Introduction

1. In three years of conflict, millions of Syrians have suffered the loss of relatives to attacks, to violence in detention facilities, to disappearances and to starvation. Hundreds of thousands have lost their lives. The failure to protect civilians, both from the conduct of the Syrian Government forces[1] and non-State armed groups unaligned with the Government (NSAGs), has led to unspeakable suffering. An estimated 9.3 million Syrians are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance, with 4.25 million IDPs and 2.8 million refugees in neighbouring countries. The vast majority are women and children.

2. In the course of the conflict, the infrastructure that constitutes civilian life has been targeted and misused. Schools have been reduced to rubble or occupied by armed forces, hospitals have come under attack, and entire residential neighbourhoods have been destroyed. Calculated limitations on the flow of food, water and electricity have been used to inflict hardship on entire civilian populations.

3. This update covers the period from 15 March to 15 June 2014. It seeks to provide insight into the impact of the conduct of the warring parties and lack of humanitarian access on civilians. Investigations reinforce the finding that the main cause of civilian casualties, mass displacement and destruction is the deliberate targeting of civilians, indiscriminate attacks, attacks on civilian and protected objects, and the punitive imposition of sieges and blockades.

4. The Commission has compiled a rigorous dossier of eyewitness and victim accounts, corroborated cases and findings of individual responsibility. Access to victims has been ensured through extensive field investigations. The more than 3,000 interviews collected contain detailed narratives indicating a massive number of war crimes and crimes against humanity suffered by the victims of this conflict. On the basis of credible first-hand sources, patterns of violations and the practice of the warring parties has been established. The culpability of hundreds of alleged perpetrators is being determined. The result is a solid foundation of evidence that contains a resolute commitment to accountability.

5. The conflict in Syria has reached a tipping point, threatening the entire region. With warring parties in unrelenting pursuit of the illusion of a military victory, violence has escalated to an unprecedented level. For perpetrators of crimes, there is no fear or thought of consequence.

6. The international community, and specifically the Security Council, has yet to demand that the individuals perpetrating crimes against the men, women and children of Syria are held responsible. Through their inaction, a space has been created for the worst of humanity to express itself. A mere fraction of this horror is reflected in the Commission's reports.

II. Military Situation

7. As the war rages on, Government forces have been making slow but significant gains in strategic areas, such as Damascus and Aleppo governorates. Their strategy of combining brutal tactics with long-lasting sieges, together with the backing provided by external allies both in equipment and forces, has allowed them to advance and drive

[1] Throughout this Update, the term "Government forces", unless specified otherwise, includes the Syrian Armed Forces, the intelligence forces and associated militias, including the Shabiha and the popular committees/National Defence Forces.

NSAGs out of Homs city and the Qalamoun area of Damascus. Most recently, Government forces have succeeded in surrounding NSAGs in Aleppo city and threatening their supply lines.

8. NSAGs have been losing ground. In several areas, armed groups have also lost popular support due to abusive treatment of civilian populations, inability to ameliorate the humanitarian situation and corrupt management of resources under their control. Ill-fated military operations and significant losses have contributed to a decline in support.

9. Armed group infighting has continued to divert their manpower and capabilities from hostilities with Government forces. An open war has been taking place in the oil and gas rich eastern and northeastern governorates between NSAGs, including Jabhat Al-Nusra, the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) and tribal groups.

10. Nonetheless, NSAGs have been able to make advances in southern Idlib and Quneitra. This was facilitated by supportive governments to "vetted" factions of the Syrian armed groups in the form of funds, training and equipment. A number of radical groups have been attempting to portray themselves as a credible and necessary partner in the fight against ISIS.

11. ISIS' attacks on northern Iraqi cities will produce serious implications for the Syrian conflict. This will likely attract more external involvement, including an influx of foreign fighters to join all sides of the conflict. ISIS has shown itself willing to fan the flames of sectarianism, both in Iraq and in Syria. Any strengthening of their position gives rise to great concern.

III Impact of the Conflict on Civilians

12. In the nearly two thousand days since the unrest in Syria first began, civilians remain the primary victims of the brutal conflict consuming Syria. This is a direct consequence of the contagion of violence and disregard for human life that characterises the conduct of the warring parties. Syrians live in a world where decisions about whether to go to the mosque for prayers, to go to the market for food and to send their children to school have become decisions about life and death.

13. The majority of civilians are killed by indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks. Increasingly, however, attacks by Government forces and the armed opposition have targeted civilians.

14. Most of these unlawful attacks come as a result of shelling and aerial bombardment. The Government continues to rely on its control of the skies. Using fighter jets and helicopters, it bombards opposition-controlled areas, most of which still contain substantial civilian populations. Army positions at bases and checkpoints also fire artillery rounds into restive areas.

15. Opposition-controlled areas in Damascus governorate remain under attack. Beit Saber and Zabadani are shelled from army positions on their outskirts and suffer attacks from MiG jets and helicopters. In the early stages of the battle for Yabroud, the Syrian army made liberal use of artillery, mortars and rockets, killing and injuring civilians. Many of the injured could not be adequately treated at the field hospitals, increasing the number of casualties. One interviewee described the road to the hospital as being "full of blood". Towns in western Dara'a governorate including Jasem, Ibta, Saham Al-Jolan, Tseel and Tafas have come under intense artillery shelling. Between late March and early April, civilians were killed and injured in rocket attacks on the Tariq Al-Sad neighbourhood of Dara'a city.

16. Attacks on eastern Aleppo, which intensified during the Geneva II conference, have not abated. In the last three months, the Government attacked Al-Sukkari, Al-Ansari, Masakin Hanano and Al-Huluk neighbourhoods. On 1 May 2014, a Government jet fired multiple missiles into Al-Huluk market, a popular residential and commercial area that was also hosting a large number of internally displaced persons. Approximately 60 people were killed, with many more injured.

17. Despite international criticism, the Government continues to rely heavily on the use of barrel bombs. In the attacks described above, the use of mortars and rockets was often accompanied by barrel bombs, dropped from helicopters hovering high overhead. In Beit Saber, for example, attacks as late as May 2014, made free use of barrel bombs. One man stated that attacks started on Friday with the barrel bombing of areas near the mosque "because they know that's where people go at that time". In Yabroud, barrel bombs formed an essential part of the Government's assault, provoking civilian flight from the area. In Jasem, hospital staff reported receiving victims of barrel-bombing, of bodies torn to shreds and of survivors requiring amputations. The barrel bombing of Aleppo city continues unabated.

18. Government attacks across Syria have targeted areas populated by civilians, including those with high concentrations of internally displaced. This evinces a strategy of terrorising civilians by making opposition-controlled areas unliveable. In the last three months, there has been a rise in the number of civilians moving into Government-controlled areas of Aleppo city in an effort to find more secure surroundings. Even more civilians have fled across Syria's borders, seeking safe haven.

19. An increasing number of civilians have been killed and injured in attacks by NSAGs. Groups have launched rockets and mortar shells into Government-controlled areas of Damascus, Aleppo and Latakia cities and on the villages of Kasab town (Latakia) and Nubul and Zahra (Aleppo).

20. In March and April 2014, the Al-Maliki, Sharq Tijara, Bab Touma and Al-Shaghour neighbourhoods of Damascus city were subject to a barrage of rocket and mortar fire by NSAGs, some operating out of Jobar. Many of the rockets landed on or near functioning schools, killing and injuring children.

21. Between 17 and 20 April, mortar fire and rockets rained down upon western Aleppo city, hitting the neighbourhoods of Al-Midan, Sayf Al-Dawla, Sayed Ali, Al-Sulimaniya, Al-Khalaidya and Al-Zahra. As has been the case for over a year, NSAGs in Mayer, Tamoura and Anadin are shelling Nubul and Zahra. Government forces located within these towns also shell surrounding towns held by NSAGs.

22. On 21 March, NSAGs moved over Syria's northern border into the town of Kasab in northern Latakia and shelled the town, firing rockets as its predominantly Armenian population fled. On 23 March, rockets fired into the residential area of Sheikh Dahir in Latakia city killed over 10 civilians.

23. Homs city was gripped by a spate of car bombings in March and April 2014. Cars exploded in the neighbourhoods of Al-Arman on 6 March, Al-Zahra on 19 March, Karm Al-Louz on 9 April, Akrama on 14 April, and Al Abassiyah on 29 April. The cars exploded in civilian commercial and residential areas, resulting in hundreds of casualties. In the Karm Al-Louz and Al-Abasiyah attacks, two car bombs exploded in close sequence, the second timed so it would target medics and civilians who rushed to give assistance to those who were injured in the first explosion. One interviewee reported that people were now unlikely to go to the aid of victims, for fear of being killed in later bombings.

24. Detonating bombs in populated areas remains a particularly horrific phenomenon of the conflict. Even when ostensibly targeted at military objectives, these explosions kill

indiscriminately and result in scores of civilian deaths. Acts or threats of violence, the primary purpose of which is to spread terror among the civilian population, are prohibited under international law. In some incidents still under investigation, there has been no claim of responsibility for the attacks.

25. There has been a marked increase in the number of attacks on functioning schools resulting in the killing and maiming of children. On 30 April, the Government launched a missile attack on Ein Jalout primary school in Aleppo city. The school was holding an exhibition of children's art projects on their experiences during the war. The attack killed 36 people, 33 of them children and injured scores of others. There have been multiple NSAG attacks hitting schools in Damascus city. On 19 March, a mortar shell killed one child at school in Al-Maliki neighbourhood. On 15 April 2014, another child was killed and over 60 children were injured in a mortar attack on a school in Bab Touma. On 29 April, an armed group fired three mortars into a high school in Al-Shaghour in Damascus city, killing over 10 children. One child described seeing dead bodies and children covered in blood trying to run into the school for safety.

26. Civilians are in a state of constant distress. Attacks by the Government and NSAGs are entirely unpredictable and highly lethal. In opposition-controlled areas civilians describe the terror of the sound of helicopters hovering too high above to be seen by the naked eye. In Government-held areas, death may come from homemade rockets falling from the sky or from cars parked outside pharmacies.

27. The consequences of the shelling and bombardments by the warring parties have fallen heavily on children. Children present in interviews with their parents displayed distinct signs of post-traumatic stress. One woman stated that her three children, between the ages of three and eight years of age, sleep in the corners of their room "because they think it is the only safe place for them".

28. Parents, having to choose between the safety of their children and their education, have pulled their offspring out of school. One mother from Beit Saber in Damascus stated that she kept her children at home because it was too dangerous for them to attend school. One child, who survived the attack on the school in Al-Shaghour, Damascus, said that he often stayed home as his mother "was too afraid to let him go" to school.

29. Danger to Syria's civilians comes not only from aerial attacks. Equally dominant in the fears of men, women and children are the ubiquitous checkpoints they must pass through to get food, medical help, see family or to seek safer areas. The proliferation of checkpoints, erected by Government forces, has had a negative impact on the daily lives of ordinary citizens.

30. In addition to undermining freedom of movement, checkpoints are often flashpoints for violence. Extra-judicial killings, sexual assaults, beatings, enforced disappearances and arbitrary arrests occur at checkpoints manned by Government forces. Many of those detained at checkpoints eventually make their way into official Government detention facilities.

31. Reports of deaths in custody, particularly in detention centres in Damascus city, have risen dramatically. Former detainees described being held in cells with corpses of cellmates who had been tortured or died as a result of untreated medical conditions. In some instances, families were informed of the deaths by official authorities. More often, news of the fate of their loved ones was delivered by former detainees. Bodies were often not returned to families.

32. The Commission has received thousands of photographs of bodies of persons allegedly killed while in the custody of the Government. Many of the bodies are emaciated, indicating death by starvation. Almost all bear marks of horrific abuse - including

strangulation, mutilation, open wounds, burns and bruising. Such injuries are consistent with torture methods previously documented by the Commission. The preliminary analysis of a small number of photographs indicates that they were taken inside Government military facilities. Our investigations are on-going.

33. Use of torture in Government military and security facilities continues to be widespread and systematic. There are persistent reports of the use of torture – including beating, electrocution and hanging from walls – at facilities in Damascus, including Adra prison, Mezzeh detention facility and the Raid Branch of the Military Security (Branch 215).

34. There are consistent accounts of sexual assaults of female detainees at detention centres in Damascus. Detainees were not provided with access to medical care. Sexual violence also occurred at Government checkpoints. In one case, over ten women were taken from a checkpoint in Taldou (Homs) run by Popular Committee members. The women were raped at multiple locations, including in Government security branches.

35. There has been an increase in reports of arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances mainly of men and boys over the age of 10 years. Many of these arrests take places at checkpoints run by the army, security services or the National Defence Forces. There has been an update in arrests at Government checkpoints in Dara'a and Damascus governorates. In March 2013, following the fall of Yabroud to the Government, men and women from among the returning civilians were arrested at army checkpoints on roads into Yabroud. Their whereabouts are currently unknown. In multiple instances, families of men who disappeared in 2012 in Damascus and Dara'a, have been informed by the authorities that their loved ones had died in Government detention in 2014. In eastern Ghouta (Damascus) female relatives of armed group fighters were arrested as army checkpoints in order to force the surrender of the fighters.

36. The impact of disappearance on families has been profoundly distressing. With male family members absent, women and older children now shoulder the responsibility for the care of the family as best they can. One woman interviewed said she no longer allowed her 15-year-old son to go to school as she feared his being arrested by the army. The impact on younger children is traumatic, with one mother saying that her 5-year-old son "is always asking for his dad and crying".

37. NSAGs have killed and taken civilians hostage during attacks on Government-controlled areas. In the 21 March attack on Kasab, for example, fighters executed a 23-year-old Armenian Syrian. Reports of public executions in squares in towns in Al-Raqqah governorate continue to be received and are being investigated.

38. NSAGs have taken civilians hostage for ransom and to be used in prisoner exchanges. Approximately 60 women and children kidnapped as they left Nubul and Zahra in September 2013 have not yet been returned to their families. ISIS kidnapped nearly 200 Kurdish civilians during an attack on Qabasin village (Aleppo) at the end of May.

39. Journalists also continue to be targeted by NSAGs. In May, two Spanish journalists were released after nearly a year held by NSAGs, likely ISIS, inside Syria. A month later, four French journalists were similarly released. On 14 May, two British journalists were detained by an armed group while in Aleppo. One was shot in the leg following an escape attempt. They were released on the same day following the intervention of another unidentified armed group.

40. NSAGs have increasingly tortured and ill-treated civilians under their control. In Al-Raqqah, women have been beaten for having their hair uncovered in the streets. Some journalists, who were taken hostage as described above, were beaten while in the custody of

the NSAGs. At an ISIS detention centre in Al-Raqqah, former detainees reported inhuman detention conditions, including being held in small, unlit rooms, infested with fleas.

41. On 20 March, several hundred ISIS fighters surrounded Tel Akhader (Al-Raqqah) and threatened to kill its Kurdish residents if they did not leave. Terrorised, people fled with only the clothes on their backs.

42. Children continue to be recruited used to participate in hostilities. Boys between the ages of 12 and 14 were regularly seen with Popular Committees in Nubul and Zahra and in the Nairab camp in Aleppo. These children were tasked with conducting surveillance. There are reports of children under the age of 18 years being trained with and used by NSAGs in Dara'a and Hama governorates, and with ISIS in Al-Raqqah.

IV. Denial of basic human needs and destruction of essential infrastructure

43. The most dangerous places in Syria for civilians are the markets, hospitals and schools that continue to operate in desperate conditions and amid constant threat of attack. Syrians have begun to avoid such locations, resulting in dire consequences for civilian life. According to accounts from students, their parents and teachers, children in many areas no longer go to school out of fear of being targeted while in the classroom. Gathering places are easy targets, maximizing the number of civilians killed and maimed.

44. By effectively criminalizing medical care and preventing humanitarian aid from reaching those in need, the Syrian Government has ensured that those who are wounded in attacks will not receive adequate treatment and likely die from their injuries. During March and April, the Government offensive on Dara'a and Rif Damascus caused mass civilian casualties. Doctors working in field hospitals in Jasem (Dara'a) described being overwhelmed and unable to treat victims with numerous losses of limbs, head and abdomen wounds, and multiple trauma injuries characteristic of barrel bombs and cluster munitions.

45. Attacks on and interference with the treatment of the injured have become commonplace. Government forces controlling checkpoints in Damascus and Dara'a blocked the wounded from accessing hospitals, leaving them to languish. Many civilians injured by shrapnel died because they were unable to reach medical facilities. Government agents arrested and detained wounded civilians, claiming bullet or shrapnel wounds as evidence of membership in armed groups. In March and April, civilian vehicles and ambulances carrying injured people from northern Aleppo to the Turkish border were targeted by aerial strikes.

46. The denial of humanitarian assistance and removal of essential medicine and surgical supplies from aid convoys has resulted in a scarcity of the most basic medical necessities such as syringes, serum, bandages and gloves. Working amid continuous aerial bombardment, doctors and paramedics in Aleppo said barrel bombs caused "dismembered body parts dispersed beyond identification," making it impossible to count the casualties after an attack. Surgical operations are performed in appalling conditions. In a field hospital in Al-Bab (Aleppo), amputations are carried out in close proximity to recovering patients. Unable to treat the severe injuries caused by barrel bombs, one doctor said, "Most of the injured died upon reaching the hospital; the hospitals turned into morgues."

47. The shortage of medical supplies is exacerbated by intentional attacks on makeshift clinics and field hospitals inside besieged and armed group-controlled areas. One refugee who fled Yabroud explained that the field hospital was the last functioning place for the injured to receive any medical attention, since "the people helping there had almost nothing, and they were not real doctors". The hospital, located underground, was evacuated

on 16 March after buildings and houses in its vicinity were destroyed during an aerial bombardment campaign. According to survivors of the assault, the bombardment was deliberate. Once the hospital was gone, the remaining population would be forced to leave.

48. On 15 May, two missiles struck the Radwan field hospital, located in an abandoned school in Jasem, killing an orthopaedic surgeon, an anaesthesiology technician, a lab technician and a nurse. According to a resident of Jasem, the resulting lack of medical care in the town has led to an increase in infant mortality and deaths of women during childbirth. Across the country, field hospitals and makeshift clinics are concealed in underground cellars and basements. Their staff do not mark the location with a red cross or red crescent emblem, aware that it would invite attack.

49. Violence targeting humanitarian workers and facilities continues to obstruct the efforts of humanitarian agencies to deliver aid to those Syrians most in need. On 24 May, a humanitarian warehouse in Douma, eastern Ghouta, was attacked as aid workers prepared to distribute supplies to people trapped inside the city. Such attacks have grave consequences for civilians. A doctor who treated patients from eastern Ghouta described numerous cases of malnutrition and starvation.

50. In Resolution 2139 on humanitarian access, the Security Council demanded that restrictions on the flow of food, water and medicines could not be used to punish entire populations. The Syrian Government and certain NSAGs continue to do so. Thousands of civilians remain in armed-group controlled areas surrounded by Syrian military checkpoints. Victims of sieges consistently describe the pain of being encircled, subjected to continuous shelling and aerial bombardment, and slowly deteriorating without food and medicine. In Damascus, Yarmouk and eastern Ghouta remain sealed by Government forces.

51. The siege of Yarmouk, one of the tightest and longest sieges of the Syrian conflict, continues to be enforced. Since 2013, civilians trapped in Yarmouk have faced shortages of basic necessities, leading to severe malnutrition and starvation. One relief worker operating inside the camp described the conditions as a "humanitarian disaster." UNRWA has been able to periodically deliver food and nutritional assistance to the estimated 20,000 people that remain inside the camp. However, deliveries are irregular and severely inadequate. The last medical clinic inside Yarmouk is no longer operational. Volunteers and paramedical trainees provide primitive first aid to pregnant women, children and the elderly – who are blocked from leaving the camp – and several cases of women dying during childbirth due to inadequate medical care and malnutrition have been documented. The Syrian Government has refused to authorize the inclusion of medicine and surgical supplies in aid deliveries. Army and Government agents enforce these restrictions through a strict monitoring system at checkpoints.

52. Food continues to be confiscated at checkpoints, and women bear the disproportionate burden of harassment and arrests for attempting to take bread into besieged areas. In April, ten women were arrested at a checkpoint on their way from Aqrabaa (Dara'a) – where no functional bakeries remain – to Khan Al Sheikh village. They were detained at the Military Intelligence Frontline Branch (Branch 220) in Sa'sa, and accused of assisting the opposition on the grounds that they purchased more than the permitted two bags of bread. Zabadani, a suburb of Damascus, has been surrounded for over one year. With no bakeries left in the town, residents travel to Bloudan to purchase bread. In mid-April, several women were arrested at a checkpoint between Bloudan and Zabadani and accused of smuggling bread. At Takiyah checkpoint on the only road from Zabadani to Damascus, a large banner reads "Kneel or Starve."

53. Such tactics have led to local ceasefires. Where ceasefires are negotiated, they should be for humanitarian reasons and ensure that evacuees have access to basic guarantees and in particular are not detained arbitrarily.

54. As a result of negotiated truces in Damascus suburbs, including Qudsaya, Beit Sahm, Yalda and Barzeh, armed groups put down their arms and Government forces ceased shelling. Limited humanitarian aid was allowed in and basic services, such as electricity, water and medical care were restored, leading to an alleviation of civilian suffering. Where truces are negotiated, they should aim for unhindered access to humanitarian assistances and guarantee to protect the rights of the affected population, particularly security of the person and freedom and movement.

55. The warring parties have deliberately disabled and destroyed civilian infrastructure to control basic necessities indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. From 5 to 14 May, the main water supply in Aleppo city was cut off. Residents suffered from a lack of sanitation and clean drinking water, resorting to makeshift water pumps and ground water. Damage caused to the water distribution network by bombardment and shelling severely aggravated the situation. On 28 February, as ISIS withdrew from Azaz (Aleppo) fighters detonated the Al Faisal Grain Mill and silo, destroying a major grain processing and storage facility that served the entire northern Aleppo countryside. The attack denied the civilian population sustenance and deprived them of access to an essential commodity.

56. Nubul and Zahra (Aleppo) continue to be besieged by NSAGs, including Jabhat Al Nusra and the Islamic Front. Prolonged shortages of food, medicine, oil and cooking fuel have led to a severe deterioration of humanitarian conditions in the two towns. Smuggling routes to the northern Kurdish villages have been obstructed by PKK checkpoints that charge fees for the transport of food and basic necessities. Humanitarian aid has also been seized for political purposes. In Qamishli (Al Hasakah) one former resident described how Syrian government and PYD officials unequally distributed UN relief packages to reward their supporters and punish their opponents.

57. Both Government forces and NSAGs have targeted the food supply and points of food distribution. Attacks on commercial streets and markets have become a hallmark of the aerial bombardment of eastern Aleppo as well as of Jasem and Tafas (Dara'a).

58. The military strategy employed by the Government is one of inflicting terror on civilians, starving them, and ultimately clearing them from each area. The human cost has been catastrophic. Civilians are uprooted and dehumanized. Their basic needs as human beings – the need and the right to water, food, and medical care – are denied and obstructed.

59. Arbitrary restrictions and obstacles to the delivery of aid continue to be imposed by all sides to the conflict, with devastating consequences for civilians in hard to reach areas. According to OCHA, there has been a significant decline in humanitarian assistance over the last three months. Humanitarian aid has been instrumentalised for military gain. The bureaucratic hurdles imposed by the Syrian Government are a calculated obstruction of aid to civilians living in areas under non-State armed group control. The conditions imposed by armed groups on the delivery of humanitarian assistance use civilian suffering as a retaliatory measure.

60. In the context of these immeasurable challenges, humanitarian workers have been deliberately targeted, preventing them from delivering aid and curtailing the activities of humanitarian agencies. NGOs have been expelled from areas held by armed groups. 25 UNRWA staff have been detained or are missing, while over 50 humanitarian workers have been killed since March 2011, including 34 SARC volunteers, 16 UN and 1 NGO staff. Attacks on humanitarian personnel paralyze assistance efforts, depriving those most in need of aid.

V. Conclusion

61. The Commission continues to urge a negotiated political solution. Recent overtures between influential regional actors could provide the basis for future dialogue and a path through which a political solution may yet be found.

62. This is the final and crucial month for Syria to fulfill its obligations to eliminate its chemical weapons stocks under Resolution 2118. While unanimously supported, Resolution 2139 has been egregiously violated. The decisions and commitments of the Security Council are being disregarded. The Security Council must strengthen the mechanisms for implementing its resolutions. Under the UN Charter, there are tools that remain at its disposal and it is imperative that all actors comply with them.

63. The longer the conflict in Syria continues, the greater the risk that the suffering of millions will be obscured by statistics. Behind the 9.3 million people in need of urgent humanitarian assistance are individual stories of unimaginable suffering. In documenting a mere fraction of these stories, the Commission has uncovered large-scale violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

64. Despite the efforts of Lakhdar Brahimi, the former Joint Special Representative for the United Nations and the Arab League, influential states have abandoned attempts to reach a negotiated political settlement. Certain states continue to deliver mass shipments of arms, artillery and aircraft to the Syrian Government or contribute with logistical and strategic assistance. Other states support NSAGs with weapons and financial support. None of these states can claim ignorance that the weapons they transfer to the warring parties in Syria are used in the perpetration of war crimes and violations of human rights.

65. A regional war in the Middle East draws ever closer. Events in neighbouring Iraq will have violent repercussions for Syria. The most dangerous aspect of these developments has been the rise of the sectarian threat, a direct consequence of the dominance of extremist groups like ISIS. Growing numbers of radical fighters are targeting not only Sunni communities under their control but also minority communities including the Shia, Alawites, Christians, Armenians, Druze and Kurds.

66. The Commission, through its work over nearly three years, stands as a commitment to future accountability. That responsibility for realizing this commitment rests with the international community, and particularly with influential states. A recently vetoed Security Council resolution on the referral of Syria to the ICC has silenced the victims and empowered the perpetrators.

67. We have travelled historic distances in pursuit of justice in the former Yugoslavia, in Sierra Leone and in Rwanda, to name a few. But the international community has stumbled and fallen when it has come to seeking justice for and in our protection of the Syrian people. In Syria, the majority of the population are victims of the current conflict. They are entitled to expect, in spite of all they have suffered, that justice will not be denied to them.